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# JEVONS BLOCK

BY

KATE BUSS



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# JEVONS BLOCK

A BOOK OF SEX ENMITY

BY

KATE BUSS

11



BOSTON

McGRATH-SHERRILL PRESS

NINETEEN SEVENTEEN

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*Thanks are due to the editors of  
Others, The Poetry Review, and The Boston Transcript  
for their permission to reprint certain of the  
poems included in this volume.*





To Arabelle and Arthrite Bacon,  
To Ivan and Elise,  
To a man who sees the substance  
In mirrors,  
I am indebted  
For the truth of Jevons Block.

# Jevons Block

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## PROLOGUE BY THE ELEVATOR BOY



You see me as the elevator boy,  
But the actuality of my position is ephemeral ;  
In a year I shall receive a degree in medicine  
And go.  
Meanwhile I study the colossal symbol of a human being  
In this pile of masonry  
That sanctions the ugly  
In ornament, in smiles, in sex.  
I hear a human anger in my signal bell.  
The shaft down which the elevator slides  
Is the spine to keep the system together ;  
And the corridors are nerves that link each room  
As heart and brain that strive in secret.  
Am I responsible to have said it?  
Or responsible only so far as I have seen the scheme unfairly ?  
Abnormal and abortive matter  
Tighten the leash on truth.  
To deceive is to establish an enemy —  
Which brings me to the theme  
That scars and shadows Jevons Block.



PROLOGUE BY THE ELEVATOR BOY, *continued*



It is the subconscious enmity  
Of the men and women in it.  
You may hear it in the labored breathing,  
See it in the eyes that seek for salvage  
As hawkers swoop and seize in isolation.  
If sex were meant to be an inhibition,  
Would God have planned it in dependent atoms ?  
The poet speaks as though it were a cloak  
To smarten the circumstance of living—  
Poor old flabby Bacon—  
Miss Ruth's too young to know beyond solicitation—  
Some never see the enmity of sexes,  
Having minds that sift no ash—  
But Anabelle is scarred and states the reason,  
And Draemer says a woman is the open door to boredom.  
In each  
The over-sense of sex  
Idles the libido to sterile purpose  
And motivates in Jevons Block  
To evade responsibility.



Arabelle

# ARABELLE

## *Perfumes and Cosmetics*



I dislike men,  
Dislike them for the strain  
They put on women.  
If I didn't have to earn a living  
I'd snap my fingers at this fading hair of mine  
And let the colour in my cheeks  
Begin to go.  
I'd sit down to it  
And rock my age in comfort by the fire.  
Forty-seven and poor —  
If you're single —  
Is the devil of a combination for a woman.  
Every time a married one  
Comes in to buy a box of rouge  
I'd like to tell her she's a fool to do it  
When she's not obliged to look young.  
Once I said as much  
And the woman answered  
"I guess you're not married  
Or you'd know the reason". . .  
I dislike men  
For the strain they put on women.



Arthrite Bacon

# ARTHRITE BACON

*Poetry Bookshop*



I married a famous palmist  
In Leipzig —  
Joined myself to one  
Who had imagination but no rhythm in her soul —  
To gain a home  
Long since dissolved by extravagance and death.  
It was my desire to live well;  
In Paris if I might choose  
Where poets are not so much the fashion  
As the feeders of a lyric nation.  
The Alexandrine was my metre,  
None it seems care about that in this country.  
And not to starve I stilled my song  
To vend the songs of other poets  
Whose vocation is but avocation now with me.  
Fate has not been friend to me.  
Could I have loved like Rupert Brooke  
Or lived like Amy Lowell  
I ask you fairly to decide  
If I'd be urging you to buy their books  
Instead of selling my own?



Raphael Lenski

# RAPHAEL LENSKI

*Osteopath*



What would Buonarotti say  
Who worshipped Vittoria  
And the sparse line of the Sistine Chapel  
If he could see the bulk of crepe kimono  
I must model with.  
Great thighs and sagging breasts,  
Muscles I can never tighten  
'Though I punch and pound and stretch  
Until some women shriek to stay me,  
But they always come again  
In supine endeavor to get thin.  
Sometimes one imagines I love her!  
Lord! They make me sick,  
These women yearning for a new sensation.  
Do they think that I would touch them  
If I were not paid to do it.  
Master, listen!  
My lovely lady's shrined next door.





# RUTH

## *Flower Shop*



Days when trade is dull  
I dream of flowers that do not grow in dozens  
Wired for a funeral or a fête.  
Somewhere  
I imagine meadows swaying  
With whatever colour they may be,  
Ten thousand thousand blossoms  
Free their hearts  
To a robin or a chick-a-dee.  
And I may pull them for everyone's possession.  
Companion all the city children,  
To old ladies send surprise bouquets,  
Pin a flower on my lover's jacket  
Every noon at one.  
And if the sun is over-hot with shining  
And the night is late to come,  
It is no matter.  
There'll be just as many more  
Tomorrow morning  
Fresh to feel the sun.



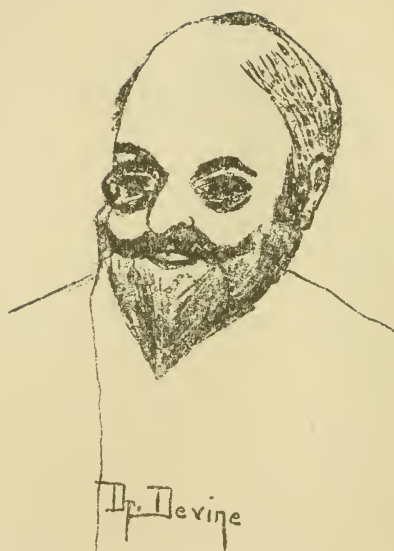
Arkel Aronian

# ARKEL ARONIAN

## *Rugs Woven and Repaired*



Weaving rugs to please a rich man  
Weaving luck for me,  
Rich man, poor man,  
Waiting for a rug to finish  
Fortunes to compare!  
White's for luck in red Bokhara,  
Red of warp and woof to wear.  
White to sign a compact with the Devil  
Shunting off all evil  
From my son.  
Red of thread to savour him  
White to spare —  
Pearls to play with  
And to ask a prayer —  
Sleep my son in God's securest silence.  
Thy father'll not have done  
The red Bokhara  
'Til the spring and thou  
Are come.

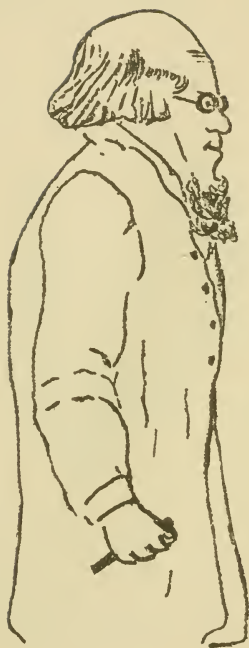


# DR. DEVINE

*Physician*



Today  
I am surfeited with women  
Their streaked faces bore me.  
Whys  
Listened to before,  
Eyes,  
Wet and bent to implore,  
Ask for quarter —  
Weak to meet a ghost  
When strong they went to seek it —  
I do not share in their delight,  
Why must they shamble at my door  
With secret bills and moist supplication  
To bribe me to break the law?  
I do and I may,  
But for today  
I shall leave these painful ladies  
To palliate their sins to someone else  
Who'll chance their wage.



Simon Weaver

# SIMON WEAVER

## *Bric-a-brac Repaired*



My neighbor is closeted  
All day  
With lovely ladies,  
They hold his hands and weep.  
If one should smile at me  
I would wipe away her tears  
With my apron,  
And join together  
The broken wings of her grief.  
I will ask my neighbor  
To bring me a lovely lady  
To mend. . . .  
He is walking down the street  
Swinging a stick



Elise



# ELISE

## *Coiffeuse*



Yes! I know Madame  
She asked for me  
And she's a millionaire  
But I hate her smell.  
You said yourself the last time she was in  
'Twas like a polecat —  
An' she's got sunken tubs to every chamber,  
I heard her tell it —  
A facial! And curl her hair!  
Gawd!  
The thermometer's a hundred.  
You say  
If I don't do it I can go!  
Where'd I go in August?. . .  
No I wouldn't,  
That's where you get off.  
This way Mrs. Smith  
There's a breeze that's blowing by this window.  
Let me have your hat,  
Sailors are so smart with linen suits.



Michael Elder.—

# MICHAEL ELDER

## *Hats Reblocked*



I've worked on hats since I was seventeen  
And now I'm close to seventy.  
Straw for tulip and the caring weather,  
Felt for winter —  
Fits more firmly on old men's hair —  
Wide brim narrowed by a quarter inch  
(Shows as though 'twas on your nose to some)  
Ribbon freshed and curve pressed straight.  
Once I used to ponder  
Why a hat should need reshaping  
Just the time some man had formed it  
To a firm and fellowed feeling  
By a few months wear.  
I have learned  
Through feeling bands that sweat to fit a brow,  
That men with brains inside their heads  
Wear their hats the longest.



# M. JAMES

## *Manicure*



I have known hands all my life.  
It is my bread to tint an ageing palm  
That scants its tip for rosaline  
And the careful removal of dry flesh.  
Butter for my bread  
I buy from fingers that make light with mine  
And slide a dollar in between to make it right.  
Hands are mostly all alike  
Thinking through their fingertips  
Of bargaining and lust.  
But his are different,  
Lean and unconcerned with me,  
Even when lying idle in soapy water.  
Just to feel his fingers for five minutes  
I'd perfume them, without money,  
To philander at another breast than mine.  
But some day —  
Before I'm faded with the wanting —  
I shall do his nails in the farther room  
And take the pay for waiting  
There.  
Little enough it will be  
But long cherishing quick spent.



# JUKES

## *Appraiser*



All life's for shrewd appraising.  
Fools and dreamers take a turn at telling values  
And philosophers have tried it.  
Some measure men by bed and book  
That all the world may see to look —  
The fools are these.  
And some will regulate the count  
By what they are themselves —  
These are dreamers.  
Household sticks aren't much to price a life  
That's furnished by secrets and long sittings;  
Nor much to make a living by perhaps you'll think,  
But that's the humor in the plan  
Though few will laugh to feel it.  
Grotesques —  
In low or high relief —  
We fill the earth's entablature  
With ashlar or with clay,  
And form its decoration. . . .  
When I tiptoe through empty dwellings  
And see in dusty mirrors  
Doubts and potent failures  
That grimace in over-ponderous flesh  
I am too terrified to laugh.  
These the Great Appraiser will inspect  
When I have left my human house untenanted.





# LÉANDRE

## *Sample Shoes*



Staccato women  
Wear out paid for leather  
Seeking newer shoes.  
Foolish shoppers  
With their busy quests and baffled eyes.  
Sometimes one is sorry for me  
Selling.  
There is recompense for every service.  
And all the day  
Through which my long reflective fingers  
Feel the urge beneath the silk  
I am content to linger  
At your unshod feet.



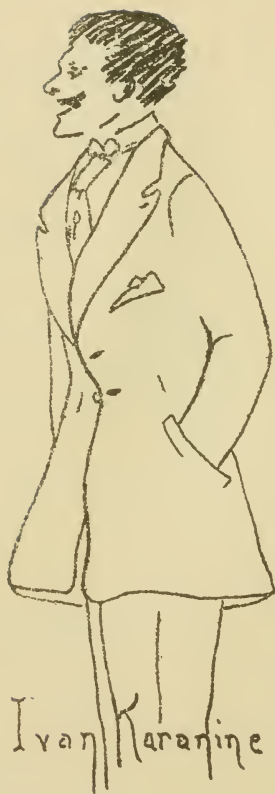
Célestine Dérème

# CELÉSTE DÉRÈME

## *Corsetière*



Nietzsche says  
Woman has cause for shame  
If she unlearns her art of charming.  
But he had no more transparent plane  
From which to analyze the world  
Than I who corset idle women  
And stand to labour to their conversation.  
Tiens! Aphrodite is long dead  
And her progeny are become asexual marionettes  
To dance and not pay.  
Some women aid slackened muscles  
With steel and satin stripes,  
Some buy stiffened nainsook  
To shape their barrenness,  
And mirrors flatter the deception.  
Yesterday I measured a fevered creature  
To suckle a child  
And she completes the metaphor.  
Clothed in renascent flesh  
A mirror seemed the last place that she cared to look.  
When I rejoiced to see comeliness  
Arrows pointed in her eyes.  
She was too deceived by fantasie  
To divine her glory.



# IVAN KARENINE

## *Dancing Master*



One step — two step —  
Pardon if I use a pressure  
My arm dictates the measure, Madame.  
Listen  
You who wonder why I dance no longer  
At the court in Russia.  
War's the reason —  
I must fight or live elsewhere —  
War has naught to do with dancing.  
War is murder! Mars its wanton father. . . .  
Sometimes Earth brings forth a bastard.  
On a silver night she smiles to say  
"This son of mine I do not breed to fight"  
I was born within this Mother-rhythm  
Of listening feet and low and lissome laughter  
Where ecstasy is breath and measure to the senses,  
And I can never be a citizen of slaughter.  
But Mars has sought to snare my feet with battle anthems.  
And all the day inside my alien head  
The rage that sped me here  
Shrieks to follow after.  
One step — two step —  
Rhythmed like marching soldiers,  
Swells to martial music  
In a language spiked with swords.



# WHILEMINA WINTER

## *Smart Shop*



Once I dreamed  
My mission was to make the world good looking,  
The women I mean —  
The world is round for men and slopes their way  
But women need to harbour youth to stay —  
I'm not for suffrage, as you may think from what I say.  
But I don't need to ask a favor,  
And my hair has kept its russet fret and fleck  
(I'm quoting now about my hair)  
However, *revenons à nos moutons* as the Frenchmen say.  
I bought this shop from a girl who wished to marry,  
Planned to dress no two the same  
But show to each her own attainment  
With clothes objectively designed.  
Before a year was up I saw I'd never make a living  
Forcing personalities.  
Then I figured what it is that Eve is really wanting  
And discovered — what no male has ever doubted —  
That every woman dressed to please some man,  
And few men notice what their women wear  
If the price is right.  
Now I dress them all alike  
And they are better pleased to look like some one else  
And I can pay my bills.



Sidney Taft



# SIDNEY FALK

## *Drugs*



Miss Winter's just been in  
To drink her malted milk.  
She buys no other stuff of me —  
No boxes with their value in the label —  
And I don't believe she trades with Anabelle.  
She says that all a woman needs is work  
To keep her circulation up.  
Miss Winter's something of a joker,  
Insists that husbands are like drugs  
A narcotic to the nervous system.  
She says she dreams of life  
In terms of dresses  
Just as I with drugs.  
I wish she didn't feel so strong for clothing strangers —  
But it's great to hear her say  
Deception, respite, dreams, and courage  
Find in each of us a sharer.  
And I can wait 'til she is over-tired  
To alchemize her views with mine.



Paul Draemer

# PAUL DRAEMER

## *Photographer*



Women bore me.  
Tenderly they say  
“Make me beautiful”  
And then lament  
If I let a wrinkle stay.  
They can’t see that lines are lovely,  
That life, not youth, is gay,  
Or they’d abjure the struggle  
For the adolescent surface  
Of unworked clay.  
Women bore me by too little knowledge  
Every day. . . .  
Always they are thinking  
Men are keen to legalize a look  
Or coax them to loiter on the way.  
Why can’t they sometimes take for granted  
We may wish to look away.



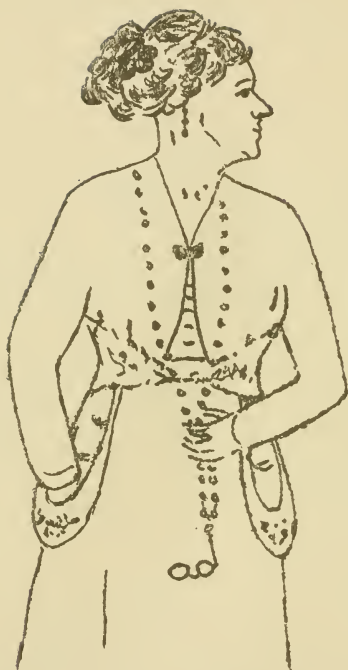
A. T. Bly

## A. BLY

### *Taxidermist*



I was once a surgeon  
With the gospel for knife —  
What sin begat I endeavored to destroy —  
But there's a strange psychology in sinning,  
Men pay to seek it  
Who will not spend a cent to put it away.  
To say my practice brought no supper to my table  
Is neither to disprove the existence of sin  
Nor keep vigil against.  
Now I scrape the skins of animals  
To live.  
Salt for their hides is best.  
Somberly  
A Javanese monkey sits on a shelf  
And obscenely chatters when I edge my tools,  
But I shall not skin him yet  
He brings trade from our brothers.



Mrs Smith-Reeder.

# MRS. SMITH-REEDER

## *Tea Room Manager*



Old women  
Nod *bien coiffé* heads  
Over Orange Pekoe  
And the bitter green  
Of English breakfast brew.  
Young girls come in  
To gaze at men  
And bewilder with their bodies.  
It is not tea they drink —  
Tea is a sophisticated taste.  
Only old women know this.



Horatio Hinklemitt.



# HORATIO HINKLEMITT

*Entertainment Bureau*



The Bible says  
“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers.”  
No doubt you are surprised to learn  
I read The Book,  
But if I didn’t seek a smile  
In Solomon  
Or that old stoic Epictetus  
I couldn’t swing this entertainment business  
In which the humor’s more apparent  
On the stage than in the office.  
It’s the laugh between us —  
Of that I’m not forgetful —  
That entertains the stranger.





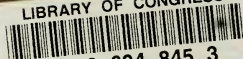








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